

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **Congressman John Conyers, Jr.**

**Fourteenth District, Michigan  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary  
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus**

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**March 19, 2002**

**CONTACT:**

**Dena Graziano (202) 226-6888**

### **Statement of Congressman John Conyers, Jr. Immigration and Claims Subcommittee Hearing**

Today, Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement at today's Immigration and Claims Subcommittee Hearing on the recent visa fiasco concerning terrorist hijackers Mohammad Atta and Marwan Al-Shehhi:

"I am astonished that while the INS remains fixated on detaining and rounding up countless Arab-Americans and Permanent Residents without any justification, it has failed to take the most basic steps to ensure that visa approvals are not issued to known terrorists.

Since the Administration seems to float a new plan to fix the INS and the Justice Department every day – sometimes twice a day – let me make a few humble suggestions.

First, please stop blaming your predecessor for your office's mistakes. The Bush political team has been in place for 14 months and you have been confirmed as Commissioner for seven months. The bureaucrats who approved the terrorist visas were ultimately accountable to you and your political team.

Immigration law may be complicated, but I cannot believe that you and your political appointees were prevented from telling the career people at INS that they should think twice before approving a student visa for a deceased terrorist. The fact that you have chosen to leave half of your political appointees vacant does not diminish your responsibility for the INS' misconduct. Can you imagine how this Committee would have reacted if Janet Reno would have told us after Waco that the career employees were to blame?

I do not say this in a partisan way. I say this as a Member of the Judiciary Committee with oversight responsibilities for the INS. I also say this as a Member who has been working for the last three months with Chairman Sensenbrenner to develop a bipartisan restructuring plan.

Second, targeting large numbers of men of middle eastern descent for questioning and detention without even a scintilla of evidence does not work. Surely, in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America the INS can do better than saying if your Arab, you're a suspect. These practices are counterproductive and send a chill through the entire Arab-American and American Muslim community. Instead of obtaining useful information and assistance from the community, the Administration's actions have had the opposite affect of frightening good people from helping you.

Third, keeping the public in the dark about your anti-terrorism plans is doomed to failure. The Department got off to a bad start, when the Attorney General could find but one hour to testify on the most far reaching civil liberties measure – the USA Patriot Act --considered in a generation. Things haven't gotten any better when Tom Ridge, the much ballyhooed head of homeland security refuses to testify before the Congress. Democracy requires the consent of the governed, and like it or not, you cannot exclude the people from your plans.

Mr. Ziglar, when I first heard that President Bush had opted to select a person with absolutely no immigration experience to head of a 35,000 employee agency, I was not impressed. Nothing that has happened at the INS since that time, including the latest fiasco, has changed my opinion.

In the wake of September 11 and all of its ramifications, I think that the time has come for the immigration buck to stop at your office. I urge you to stop playing the blame game, and work with this Committee to fix the INS."

#107-151#